

TRUE WORSHIP

What is “true worship?” I am sure that there are many interpretations for what many think are the answers to this particular question. They all may be correct. I am not going to tell anyone that their concept of what true worship may be is incorrect. I would like to however, add my thoughts to the mix. The first thing we must do is to define what worship is. To do that I am going to refer to the scriptures and see what they tell us concerning this topic.

The very first time the word “worship” is used in the scriptures is found in Genesis 22:5. It reads as follows: *“And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.”* We see that the first time the word “worship” is used in the scriptures is found when Abraham went up to a place called Mount Zion to worship the Lord.

We are all familiar with the details. Abraham went up to worship God. God told him to prepare a sacrifice. However, the sacrifice that God had ordered Abraham to offer to Him was Abraham’s only true son. The son that was to be offered unto God was the son promised to Abraham by God who came through Sarah. That son was Isaac.

As we read in Genesis 22:5, we see that they both, Abraham and Isaac, went up to the mountain to worship God. Abraham was the worshipper but the sacrifice would be – his only, true son. We know the account as we see Abraham literally prepare to offer up and sacrifice Isaac. At the last moment we know that God had prepared a substitute for Isaac as there was a ram “caught in the thicket.” Abraham was told by God to substitute the ram for Isaac.

As we know, this scenario represented what would take place many years later as Jesus, who was represented by the ram, was offered up on the cross and gave His life as a substitute for all of God’s people. You see, as we mentioned, the ram represented Jesus. However, we must also see that Abraham had represented God and Isaac represented all of man. Yes, because of the sinfulness of man, they were all destined to die.

However, God provided a substitute – the ram for Isaac. He provided the true sacrifice – the perfect sacrifice – that would take the place of all mankind - Jesus. Jesus took all of mans’ sin upon Himself. He died because of that sin but also because He was the perfect sacrifice. He would be the final sacrifice who would give His life once and for all for all of the sins of the entire world.

In this account of Abraham and Isaac, we see the first use of the term “worship” as found in the scriptures. If we look up this term “worship” we see that it is the Hebrew word, “šāḥâ” (shaw-khaw) which means to literally “bow down and prostrate oneself before God.” However, in this action, it represents even a greater aspect of the heart of the person who is doing this action of bowing down before their God. It represents the true “attitude of heart” that is within the individual.

In John 4:23, 24 we see Jesus express this aspect of what “true worship” truly is as He speaks to the woman who is at the well. He tells us, *“...the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him. For God is a spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”*

The word for “worship” used in these scriptures comes from the Greek word, “proskyneō” which means the same as the Hebrew term – “to bow down in homage to a king or one who is a great authority.” However, it also eludes us to the image of “a dog licking and kissing its masters hand in total reverence with love and adoration towards its master.”

We see in both the Hebrew and the Greek that the word “worship” involves a total expression to “bow down before God.” This becomes a lifestyle which ultimately becomes the attitude of one’s heart. This attitude is expressed in every aspect of the individual’s life. In other words, it goes far beyond what we have made worship to be in these days.

What I mean by this is that we have made “worship” to be an aspect of my relationship with God instead of it truly being my life and my lifestyle. What I mean is that worship these days have become times in which we sing, or play instruments, or dance or it involves pageantry. Now, I am not saying that these things are not aspects of worship – they truly are. However, true worship does not simply stop at these things. We must realize that these things are more of the aspect of praise to our God.

Praise is really what we do when we gather together at our services. It involves the actions of singing, playing music, dancing and other such aspects that we see within our times of gathering together. We may also do such things in our own private times. However, we must grasp and understand that these wonderful times are not the end of our lifestyle of true worship. They may end our times of praise but they do not end our lifestyle of true worship.

After we sing; after the music stops; after the dance ends or after all that “stuff” ends and our times of praising God might come to an end but our lifestyle of true worship must always continue. It continues because that is who we now are. It is who we have become – true worshippers of the true and living God.

In other words, every aspect of my life, my very life itself, continually goes on as a true worshipper of our God. If we look at the scenario in John 4:23 and 24, we see that Jesus, as He is speaking to the woman concerning “worship,” never mentions anything about singing, music, dancing, etc. The woman herself never asks or mentions those things as she converses with Jesus concerning what worship is. She is simply expressing her desire as to where to worship God. She is asking about where she can truly offer the sacrifices that God desires.

Notice how Jesus answers her. He does not answer her with a place or with different ways to worship God. No, He tells her that the “true worshipper” shall worship the Father in “spirit and truth.” This was something that really caught the attention of this woman. We see that it totally “knocks her socks off.” She was expecting an answer that would give her a place to truly worship God. She was expecting something in the natural realm of how to effectively worship God. Instead she gets a totally different answer than what she ever would have expected.

True worship of the living God is not to be relegated to things or places within the natural realm. No, true worship is “a bowing down and prostrating **your heart**,” no matter where you may be or no matter what time it is. It must be done in “spirit and in truth.” In other words true worship is an attitude of the individual’s heart. It is their lifestyle. It is simply who they are.

True worship is expressed in the believer’s very lifestyle. Yes, it may include times of singing or dancing but it is much more than that. It is the lifestyle of the child of God. It is the manor of behavior of a true believer. Our worship is much more than just song, music, banners, dance and other actions that we may do in the corporate gatherings. As mentioned previously, Jesus told the woman at the well, as well as all believers today, that true worship, real worship and those who are true worshippers who truly worship God are those who worship Him “in spirit and in truth.”

Notice Jesus tell us that true worshippers are those who are to worship God **IN** spirit and **IN** truth. Hmmm... That is interesting. Jesus tells us that worshipping God is not something we do but rather true worship is who we are. We are worshippers. We live to worship our God in **IN** spirit and **IN** truth. It is who we now are. So...what does that really mean?

Let's look at what it is speaking about when Jesus tells us that we are to now worship our God **IN** spirit. Now, I know that we have been taught that this means that we are to now worship our God with a renewed, born again spirit. This is very true but is Jesus also telling this "woman at the well" something else. What did Jesus really mean when He said that the true worshipper will worship their God **IN** spirit?

The first thing I would like to point out is that this encounter was between a "Jewish" man, Jesus, and a "Samaritan" woman. In other words, in the natural realm this was a totally "inappropriate" encounter because the Jewish people and the Samaritans did not get along. The history of this goes back to the time of the divided Kingdom of Israel. This encounter also took place at "a well." Back in that time, this most likely meant that this meeting took place at a simple hole in the ground that went to an underground spring where people would come and get their water for the day.

The other thing we notice is that Jesus was alone with this woman. She most likely was looked down upon by the other "Samaritan" women so she came alone to the well in the afternoon. This was a time when no one else would come to the well because the women that would come for water would have come earlier in the morning to get what they needed for that day. We also take notice that Jesus had sent His disciples into town to get what they needed for food, etc. Therefore they were at the well alone together.

Jesus had initiated a conversation. The woman was slow to accept and open up to this conversation. She realized that Jesus seemed to be a good, learned Jewish man. She opened up and bore her heart. She was a woman who, in her heart, was tired of all the religious stuff that was going on between the Jews and the Samaritans and she just wanted to know the truth. She was at the right place at the right time.

First, Jesus began to explain to her what true worship **was not** and that the Jewish people and the Samaritans, even though He did not explicitly say it, were both incorrect in their thinking of what God had wanted from those who truly were seeking after Him. He then tells her that they who truly worship God will worship Him "*...in spirit and in truth.*"

To say that we must worship God "*in spirit*" could mean, among other things that worship must originate from within the individual's own heart; it must be sincere and it must be motivated by the individual's love for God as well as having gratitude for all that God is and has done. Worship cannot and must not be mechanical or formalistic.

However, that does not necessarily rule out certain rituals or liturgy. Nor does it mean that rituals and liturgy are necessarily wrong to worship God with. Our worship must be infused with a heartfelt commitment of faith and love as well as a true zeal for a true and real relationship with a pure, loving and mighty God.

Jesus states that the true worshipper must also worship "*in truth.*" Simply put, the Word of God, all of it, is truth – God's truth. It is God's pure unadulterated reality of who He is and what He truly desires and what truly pleases Him. We must remember that it is **God's truth** – not what we think His truth is. This is where the difficulties lie and where the real problems concerning true worship begin. It seems so difficult to separate our truth from God's truth when we rely on our own understanding.

This is where being "in the spirit" takes control. That is why Jesus states that we must **first** worship God "in spirit." In other words we must get into God's realm – the spirit realm. It is only then that we can begin to truly see His truth, His ways and His reality of the way things really should be and how we are to now live our lives. True worship comes from those who are deeply in love with God. It is then felt inwardly and then expressed outwardly because of the individual's total understanding of the things of God.

The most important aspect for those now living “in spirit and truth” is that it involves us to now live in that lifestyle. It is the lifestyle in which God now ordains each of His true believers to live in while we are on this earth. However, this is where many believers, or so called believers, “miss it.”

Actually, I should say that this is where the true believer is truly revealed. The true believer, the true born again child of God, simply lives their life in the way that Jesus had told us and showed us how to live our lives upon this earth. We are to live our lives and worship our God through our very lives.

You see our lives and the lifestyle that we now live become the vehicles of true worship and the expression of what true worship truly is. It not just the song, the music, the dance, the banners, etc. that is our worship. No, it should be, and ultimately must be, our very lives – every aspect. It is who we are – a true worshipper of God through the lifestyle role-modeled to us by the Son of God, Jesus.

If we look at the life of Jesus, we do not see Him singing much or playing an instrument at all. Yet, we look at Him as our role model of what true worship of the Living God truly is. It is an every moment of everyday lifestyle. It is not simply singing, or playing an instrument that we enter into worship. No, it is a lifestyle.

Worship is a verb – an action word. Worship is not something we do at various time. It is not just what we do at the corporate gathering. It is not just a time at home when we pray or when we sing to God. No, it is a part of **everything** we do. Therefore, everything we do must involve worshipping our God. Being a good husband, a good wife, a good father, a good mother, a good child, a good brother or sister, a good worker, a good neighbor - all should express the lifestyle of a true worshipper of God.

If we notice the early believer’s lives we see that they all changed their manner of behavior, their lifestyle. They may have suffered terrible persecution for this change but it was very real and it was who they were. So much so, that they were willing to even give of their lives because they were totally sold out to that lifestyle. Most importantly they knew now where their true “home” was. It was with their Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit in a place we refer to as the Kingdom of God. That is the ultimate result of true worship.

We must remember therefore that worship, true worship, is not simply, nor is it only, a time of music or song or dance, etc. No it is a lifestyle, a manner of behavior that is done and expressed in every single aspect of the true believer’s life. Worship is not simply an action but rather it is a lifestyle. **True worship** is the lifestyle of the true believer of Jesus. Yes, the lifestyle of the true child of God is manifested and revealed in and through the lifestyle of **true worship**.